

Missouri Charter Public School Renewal Guide

*A Comprehensive Guide for Preparing
Missouri Charter Schools and their Sponsors
for Charter Renewal*

DEVELOPED BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS



Introduction

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is pleased to be working with the Missouri Charter Public School Sponsors and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to improve the quality of the state's charter schools in St. Louis and Kansas City.

It is NACSA's vision that all families have choices among high quality public schools that meet their children's needs. Our mission is to achieve the establishment and operation of quality charter schools through responsible oversight in the public interest. We focus our work on improving the knowledge and skill of the entities that approve, oversee and evaluate charter schools.

Based on input from Missouri Charter Public School Sponsors and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, NACSA has developed the *Missouri Charter Public School Renewal Guide*. The *Guide* contains practical guidance on how to prepare Missouri charter schools for the renewal process, as well as the systems and protocols that sponsors should put in place for effective renewal decision-making.

The *Guide* documents national best practices in charter school sponsorship consistent with the requirements of Missouri law. We encourage all Missouri Charter Public School Sponsors to utilize this guidance in establishing their renewal processes and protocols.

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Elements of Sound Renewal Decision-Making

Responsible renewal decision-making is at the very core of charter school sponsors' work.

As a principle of quality authorizing, responsible and effective charter school sponsors should articulate the full set of renewal policies, practices, and processes guiding their renewal decision-making. This *Guide* recommends best practice to Missouri sponsors for charter school renewal decision-making.

Renewal Policy

Charter school sponsoring boards are encouraged to develop a comprehensive renewal policy that contains the official practices, policies and procedures of the sponsoring board as they pertain to renewal. While sponsoring boards define and adopt the renewal policy, the sponsor's staff use the policy as a guiding document in carrying out renewal related responsibilities.

A complete charter renewal policy should include the following elements:

- the purpose of the policy;
- a description of the legal requirements associated with renewal, as well as any additional requirements defined by the charter school sponsor;
- a description of the roles of the Performance Plan and Monitoring Plan as they pertain to charter renewal, including general guidelines and methods for evaluating charter schools;
- a definition of the accountability period, which will serve as the time period under evaluation during the renewal review ¹;
- a summary of the purpose and information requests made within the charter application for renewal;
- the types of renewal that are available, including possible charter term lengths;
- the criteria and standards for earning each type of renewal; and
- other essential elements of the renewal process, including any protocol used by the sponsor's staff in determining renewal recommendations, and any special procedures in the case of a non-renewal recommendation from the sponsoring staff.

The renewal policy should include those elements of charter renewal that are required by statute, as well as any additional sponsor-defined standards or requirements. Given that Missouri charter school law gives sponsors substantial discretion, it is appropriate for charter school sponsors to articulate specific expectations that a charter school applying for renewal must meet in order to earn renewal, as well as the details of the decision-making process.

When making renewal decisions, sponsor boards should remain faithful to their renewal policies, even in the face of difficult decisions that will result in charter school closure.

¹ For charter schools in their first charter term, "the accountability period" is often defined as the first through penultimate years of the school's charter period because student achievement data and accountability information is typically unavailable during the last year of a school's charter term (which is the same year during which the school's renewal is under consideration). For charter schools in subsequent charter terms, "the accountability period" should be defined as the last year of the school's previous charter term through the penultimate year of the charter term under review.

The Charter Application for Renewal

The submission of a charter application for renewal is an important step in the chain of renewal events. In requesting renewal of the school's charter, the governing board of the school should submit a concise, comprehensive renewal application.

Missouri charter school sponsors should require a consistent format for charter applications for renewal. The application for charter renewal should allow a charter school flexibility in presenting evidence that it has met the terms of its charter and should provide guidance related to the format of the submission.

Components of Charter Applications for Renewal

Charter applications for renewal should document the school's current academic program, organizational and governance structure, and financial plan for the term of a proposed charter. Specifically, Missouri charter school sponsors should request that charter schools submit:

- a mission statement for the school;
- a description of the school's current organizational structure and bylaws of the governing body;
- a financial plan for the next term of operation, including provisions for annual audits;
- current copies of the charter school's policies for securing personnel services, personnel policies, qualifications, and professional development plan;
- a description of the grades or ages of students currently being served and the anticipated ages or grades that the school will serve in the new charter term (if the school is still expanding);
- the school's current calendar of operation;
- the educational goals and objectives to be achieved by the school during the next term of the charter;
- a description of the school's current educational program and curriculum;
- the requested term of the charter;
- a description of the school's performance standards for students;
- a description of the governance and operation of the charter school, including the nature and extent of parental, professional educator and community involvement in the governance and operation of the charter school; and
- the school's policies on student discipline and student admission.

Recommended Renewal Process at-a-Glance

1. Schools Submits Charter Application for Renewal and Report on Progress Toward Meeting Goals
2. Sponsor Reviews Charter Application for Renewal and Conducts Renewal Inspection Visit
3. Sponsor Staff Considers Evidence Gathered over the Term of the Charter* and Prepares Recommendation Regarding Renewal to Sponsoring Board.
**including Charter Application for Renewal, Report on Progress Toward Meeting Goals, and School Performance Profiles from Years 1–4)*
4. Sponsoring Board Takes Action on Recommendation Regarding Renewal
5. Sponsor Enters into Renewal Charter Contract
OR
Sponsor Begins School Closure Processes

Report on Progress toward Meeting Performance Plan Targets

Central to the premise of charter school renewal is that renewal decisions are made based on a school's record of meeting its Performance Plan targets. Charter schools seeking renewal should therefore report upon the extent to which they have met the targets contained within their Performance Plans over the course of their current charter term.

Charter school sponsors should create and adopt a standardized template (see Figure 1) that provides schools sufficient guidance regarding renewal expectations. Ideally, sponsors should ask charter schools to use this template in reporting upon their Performance Plan targets within the Annual Report submitted to the sponsor per the Monitoring Plan each year. This process will assist charter school sponsors in creating annual Performance Profiles for the school, which, in turn, composes part of the school's record of performance for renewal. Charter schools should also follow this template to provide a summary regarding the school's progress toward meeting Performance Plan targets during the accountability period.

Figure 1: Sample Template for the Report on Progress toward Meeting Performance Plan Targets²

Academic Program Quality

INDICATOR	TARGET	ACTUAL RESULT	EVALUATION
AYP determination	The school will make AYP in the aggregate.	Sample Response: <i>Our school has made AYP in the aggregate.</i>	Sample Response: <i>Target met.</i>
	The school will make AYP for all statistically significant subgroups.		
	The school will not have advanced accountability status (School Improvement Levels 1-5).		
Proficiency Levels on State Assessments by Grade and Subject	XX% of students will score Proficient or Advanced		
	XX% of students will score at [each performance level]		
	Each year, the percentage of students scoring the bottom two performance levels will be reduced.		
	The school meet and maintain required MPI score improvements from one year to the next		
	XX% of graduates will score at or above the national scaled score average on the ACT		

² The Indicators and Targets referenced in this template are the same Indicators and Targets included in the Model Performance Plan. Sponsors should consult the Performance Plan for a full explanation of the Indicators, Measures, and Metrics upon which these Targets are based. The Model Performance Plan also provides guidance on determining the degree to which the school has met each Target.

Figure 1: Sample Template for the Report on Progress toward Meeting Performance Plan Targets² (continued)

Academic Program Quality (continued)

INDICATOR	TARGET	ACTUAL RESULT	EVALUATION
Student Progress Over Time (Growth)	XX% of students will achieve or exceed typical or average growth, based on similar starting points (e.g., one year's growth in one year's time)		
	XX% of students will make or exceed target growth, based on similar starting points		
	XX% of students will make growth to reach or maintain proficiency		
	XX% of proficient or advanced students will maintain or improve their performance level		
	XX% of students below proficient that move to a higher performance level		
	XX% of students move to a higher performance level		
Postsecondary Readiness and Success (for High Schools)	XX% of students are enrolled in a college-prep curriculum		
	XX% of graduates submit application(s) to postsecondary institutions		
	The school maintains a graduation rate of XX%		
	XX% of graduates enter college		

Figure 1: Sample Template for the Report on Progress toward Meeting Performance Plan Targets² (*continued*)

Academic Program Quality (*continued*)

INDICATOR	TARGET	ACTUAL RESULT	EVALUATION
Postsecondary Readiness and Success (for High Schools)	XX% of career education completers are placed in occupations related to their training, in college, or in the military		
Student Engagement	K-8 attendance : XX%		
	9-12 attendance: XX%		
	K-12 attendance: XX%		
	XX% of students re-enroll from one year to the next		

Figure 1: Sample Template for the Report on Progress toward Meeting Performance Plan Targets² (continued)

Operational Program Quality

INDICATOR	TARGET	ACTUAL RESULT	EVALUATION
Financial Performance & Sustainability	Timely and sufficient filing of required reports		
	Positive net assets and adequate reserve		
	Adequate working capital		
	Balanced budget based on valid, evidence-based assumptions		
	General budget to actual alignment		
	In good standing with respect to financial obligations		
	Unqualified audits		
	No major audit findings		
School Governing Board Performance & Stewardship	Meetings are noticed and conducted consistent with open meetings law		
	Decision-making that is free of conflicts and consistent		
	Decision-making that is free of conflicts and consistent with the school governing board's fiduciary duty to act in the best interest of the school		

Figure 1: Sample Template for the Report on Progress toward Meeting Performance Plan Targets² (*continued*)

Operational Program Quality (*continued*)

INDICATOR	TARGET	ACTUAL RESULT	EVALUATION
	Material compliance with applicable due process laws and school governing board policy		
	On time and complete, consistent with applicable law, the charter, and sponsor policy		
	Material compliance with all applicable law		
Parent & Community Engagement	Lottery conducted in accordance with applicable law, school governing board policy and the terms of the charter		

Timing of the Filing of a Charter Application for Renewal

Charter school sponsors should establish clear deadlines for the filing of a charter application for renewal and its review. These deadlines enable schools to plan appropriately for either a subsequent charter term or, in the case of a non-renewal decision, school closure. They also ensure that the charter school sponsor and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education have adequate time and opportunity to properly evaluate the school's performance and take action on a timely basis.

Renewal Inspection Visit

The purpose of the renewal inspection visit is to corroborate assertions made within the charter application for renewal related to program design elements, compliance with law and regulations, and financial policies and procedures. The purpose of the inspection visit is *not* to provide charter school operators with recommendations about the day-to-day operations of the school.

The renewal visit also provides sponsors with an opportunity to collect and review additional information that may be too voluminous to include within the charter application for renewal. Renewal inspection visits should be purposeful and organized around specific activities linked to the indicators, measures and metrics and targets identified in the school's Performance Plan. Visits should occur between the time that a charter school submits a charter application for renewal and the time that the sponsor's staff makes a recommendation to its governing board regarding the outcome of the renewal process.

The scope of a renewal inspection visit will vary depending upon the resources available to each sponsor and the performance record of each of its schools. In some cases, schools that have proven themselves as high-functioning and healthy through the attainment of targets within the Performance Plan and timely compliance with all other reporting requirements may warrant a renewal inspection visit shorter in duration and depth. Schools that have not demonstrated a compelling record of success in meeting targets contained within the Performance Plan and schools that have difficulty meeting other reporting requirements should receive a renewal inspection visit that is more comprehensive. If a sponsor anticipates placing a school's charter on probation or revoking or non-renewing a school's charter, school inspection visits are critical monitoring events.

Sponsors should adhere to the following general guidelines in conducting renewal inspection visits:

1. Organize the renewal inspection visit around a specific protocol

The purpose of the renewal inspection visit is to corroborate claims made within the charter application for renewal related to the implementation of program design elements, financial policies and procedures, and compliance with law and regulations. Renewal inspection visits should be purposeful and organized around specific activities linked to the indicators, measures and metrics and targets identified in the school's Performance Plan.

Formal site visits are best structured by a site visit protocol defining the types of events that happen during the visit. Renewal inspection visit protocols should be aligned and consistent with protocols for site visits taking place throughout the charter term. A formal protocol should outline the process for document review; interviews with the school governing board and leadership; classroom observations; school site walk-through. The protocol also includes a sample schedule and sample key questions. It is aligned with the Performance Plan and includes description of roles and responsibilities of the school and visit team members.

At the conclusion of the visit, the sponsor should not share any report on the sponsor's anticipated renewal recommendation.

2.Document and share the renewal inspection visit protocol

Sponsors should document the renewal inspection visit protocol and related training materials and make these resources available to schools and the public. Schools should understand that renewal inspection visits are essential accountability and monitoring events, and should expect to have staff from the sponsoring office, or its representatives, on-site at the conclusion of each charter term.

3.Ensure consistency

Sponsors should use the same overall renewal visit protocol for all school visits, but make modifications in response to individual school elements such as type, grade range, size, accountability status, and age. Sponsors use these visits to gather on-site qualitative and quantitative information that assists in evaluating a school's progress toward meeting the targets set in the Performance Plan.

In some cases, sponsors may need to engage an outside contractor to help with school renewal inspection visits due to demands upon the sponsor staff, or a particularly contentious charter revocation or non-renewal decision that would benefit from third-party review *in addition to adherence to the monitoring activities identified in the school's Performance and Monitoring Plans*. If sponsors utilize a third party to carry out site visits, these contractors should use the sponsor's protocol for site visits. Further, third party contractors should be barred from making suggestions or recommendations for school improvement during the site visit. They also should not attempt to sell services targeted at improving the academics, governance or fiscal practices of the school.

From Monitoring to Renewal Decision-Making: A Step-by-Step Guide

The following graphic shows how Missouri Charter Public School Sponsors can use the evidence collected from effective monitoring to create a basis for sound merit-based renewal decision-making.

PRE-OPENING REQUIREMENTS

Compliance monitoring to ensure school readiness to provide instruction to students

PERFORMANCE PROFILE

YEAR 1

- Academic Performance Results compared to Performance Plan targets
- Fiscal Reporting, including board-approved budget, annual audit, and quarterly financial reports
- Annual Report
- Compliance Monitoring

PERFORMANCE PROFILE

YEAR 2

- Academic Performance Results compared to Performance Plan targets
- Fiscal Reporting, including board-approved budget, annual audit, and quarterly financial reports
- Site Visit Report
- Annual Report
- Compliance Monitoring
- Performance Profile Year 1

PERFORMANCE PROFILE

YEAR 3

- Academic Performance Results compared to Performance Plan targets
- Fiscal Reporting, including board-approved budget, annual audit, and quarterly financial reports
- Site Visit Report
- Annual Report
- Compliance Monitoring
- Performance Profile Year 1 and 2

PERFORMANCE PROFILE

YEAR 4

- Academic Performance Results compared to Performance Plan targets
- Fiscal Reporting, including board-approved budget, annual audit, and quarterly financial reports
- Site Visit Report
- Annual Report
- Compliance Monitoring
- Performance Profile Year 1–3

RENEWAL PERFORMANCE PROFILE

YEAR 5

- Academic Performance Results compared to Performance Plan targets
- Fiscal Reporting, including board-approved budget, annual audit, and quarterly financial reports
- Charter Application for Renewal
- Renewal Inspection Visit Report
- Annual Report
- Compliance Monitoring
- Performance Profile Year 1–4

RENEWAL DECISION

Renewal Recommendations

Subsequent to the renewal inspection visit, staff in the sponsor's office should generate a recommendation to the governing board of the sponsor regarding charter renewal.

Formulation of a Renewal Recommendation

1. Consistent with the Monitoring Plan, staff base their recommendation on an analysis of school performance data, and the qualitative and quantitative body of evidence gathered over the course of the school's charter term. Sources of evidence include:

- Annual reports;
- Audit reports;
- The school's documented progress toward meeting targets contained within the Performance Plan;
- Site visit and renewal inspection reports;
- Performance profiles generated throughout the term of the charter; and
- The school's charter application for renewal.

Staff analyze this information to determine the extent to which the school has met the targets articulated in the school's Performance Plan, and compare its overall performance against the standards and criteria articulated within the sponsor's renewal policy when formulating its renewal recommendation.

2. Charter schools that are proposing changes to the academic program (including grades offered), organizational structure, financial plans, facility, or location of the school require careful review ensuring that the school has met the targets in its Performance Plan, has met the standards and criteria in the sponsor's renewal policy; and demonstrated performance meriting approval of the proposed changes.

³ *There may be some exceptions. For example, if the sponsor determines the proposed changes would assist the charter school in more fully meeting or exceeding the Performance Plan targets over the course of the renewal charter term.*

Sponsors should ensure that the governing board of the school has the capacity to maintain (or improve) the school's performance in the face of additional challenges resulting when existing schools expand, replicate, or relocate. The school governing board should demonstrate effective oversight and the school should have a successful record of meeting the academic targets contained within its Performance Plan if the sponsor approves such changes. *Charter schools that have struggled to meet Performance Plan targets and have minimally met standards and criteria for renewal have not demonstrated the high levels of capacity to implement their existing program, and therefore may not merit approval of such changes.*³

Some charter school sponsors find it useful to share the preliminary renewal recommendation with the charter school. The purpose is to allow the school an opportunity for comment and, in the case of a recommendation of non-renewal, for presenting additional evidence related to the school's academic, organizational, or fiscal performance. The sponsor should carefully consider any additional information only to the extent that it addresses targets contained in the school's Performance Plan. A sponsor should modify the preliminary renewal recommendation if appropriate, and/or otherwise finalize the renewal recommendation.

3. The sponsor should inform the charter school governing board of the staff's final renewal recommendation once the recommendation has been shared with the governing board of the sponsor. However, it is important for the sponsor and the school to remember that the governing board of the sponsor makes the final decision; the board is not bound by the staff recommendation.

When making a renewal decision, members of the sponsoring board should receive the staff recommendation with adequate time to review the staff's analysis and presentation of supporting evidence. This will assist decision-makers in fulfilling their responsibility to make sound, merit-based renewal decisions in alignment with their renewal policies and agreed-upon Performance Plans.

With the staff's recommendation regarding renewal in hand, it is the responsibility of the governing board of the sponsor to make the final decision whether it will renew the school's charter. This high-stakes decision should be based on reliable and valid evidence from the school's renewal application, renewal inspection visit, Monitoring Plan, Performance Plans, and Performance Profiles. A sponsor board's documents for charter renewal recommendation should be clear, concise, and follow the indicators, measures and metrics contained in the school's Performance Plan, as well as any additional standards or criteria for renewal defined within the sponsor's renewal policy.

Special Considerations in the case of Recommendations for Non-Renewal

When the sponsor's staff reaches a recommendation for non renewal, the sponsor should have in place a defined process allowing schools to review the recommendation and present additional evidence pertaining directly to Performance Plan targets. The sponsoring board requires time to deliberate and ensure that school closure is, in fact, the most appropriate action. Having defined procedures for examining non-renewal recommendations provides assurance to the sponsoring board that the renewal process was conducted in a fair and transparent way. Such non renewal procedures may include:

- Sharing the preliminary renewal recommendation with the school and allowing it to submit additional evidence, directly aligned with the targets contained within the school's Performance Plan that was not previously considered by the sponsor (as described above);
- Conducting a hearing, or community meeting, with the school community once the final recommendation for non-renewal becomes public;
- Sharing a summary of the community's verbal and written comments with the sponsoring board at the time of renewal decision-making;
- Allowing the charter school to petition for the opportunity to present evidence and legal argument in support of renewing the school to the sponsoring board; and
- Notifying the local school district and elected officials of the staff's recommendation for non-renewal.

Conclusion

The *Missouri Charter Public School Renewal Guide* presents guidance that Missouri Charter Public School Sponsors are encouraged to use when building their renewal policy, practices, and processes. From defining a renewal policy to articulating the required and recommended elements of a sound renewal process, the *Renewal Guide* melds national best practices in charter school renewal decision-making and requirements specific to Missouri charter school law.

Building a strong evidence base for charter renewal decision-making begins early in the life of a charter term. It is the responsibility of the sponsor to set out a Performance Plan for the school and monitor the school's performance on a regular and ongoing basis in alignment with the Monitoring Plan. Once the renewal process is triggered by a school governing board with the filing of a charter application for renewal, the sponsor should then engage in the process of fully reviewing and analyzing the charter school's performance in order to make an informed renewal recommendation to their governing board. This renewal review process includes a set of clear steps—review of the charter application for renewal, a renewal inspection visit, and the sorting and sifting of all evidence collected over the charter term—all of which culminates in a renewal recommendation, and ultimately, the sponsoring board's decision regarding renewal of the charter. In the case of a positive renewal recommendation, the sponsor concludes the renewal process with the issuance of a new renewal charter contract. In the case of non-renewal, the charter school sponsor should begin the school closure process.

Sound renewal decision-making is at the core of a charter school sponsor's responsibilities, and is the key to ensuring charter school quality. While new charters are granted based on solidly constructed plans and *promises* for success, renewal charters are granted based upon *evidence* that the school has indeed met academic, organizational, and fiscal targets outlined in its Performance Plan. It is critical to the effectiveness of the Missouri charter school movement that Missouri Charter Public School Sponsors persist in their commitment to making charter renewal decisions that prioritize charter school quality, high levels of student academic achievement, strong school organizations, and fiscal responsibility.